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Redevelopment Board Minutes 02/14/2011

Minutes of Monday, February 14, 2011
Arlington Redevelopment Board
Second Floor Conference Room, Town Hall
Approved 3/14/11

Members Present:
Michael Cayer
Ted Fields
Bruce Fitzsimmons
Chris Loreti, Chairman
Andrew West

Mr. Loreti opened the meeting at 7:00pm. Ms. Kowalski provided an update on the Symmes project, and addressed questions about the process that the owner, JPI, and their lender, PNC Bank, would pursue for reaching an agreement with a new developer.

Jake Upton and Budge Upton of Upton Partners presented their concept to the Board for redeveloping Symmes. Jake Upton had previously been part of the EA Fish development team that received the special permit to develop the Symmes site. The new proposal would amend the existing special permit and see the allowance of 90 assisted living units on the lower portion of the site. The Upton concept would include construction of the affordable units on site, and would start with a mix of home-ownership and rental units, with the intent to convert on the strength of the initial townhouse sales. The buildings at the back would be condominiums. They would not build on the Medical Office Building site, but would landscape it for marketing purposes. The two-story flats would convert to condos later, Mr. Upton said, when the market permits.

Mr. West commented that the site design seemed to have distinct places, even neighborhoods, within the project.

Mr. Upton stated that the Land Disposition Agreement would be modified. He stated that if the first twelve condominiums sold quickly, they would increase condominium units elsewhere in the project.

Mr. Loreti asked if the proposal depended upon affordable housing bylaw changes. Mr. Upton said it did not, except for the assisted living. He said that he understood that the pricing of the affordable housing for the upper portion was as permitted, grandfathered from the former bylaw.

Mr. Upton confirmed that there was a similar amount of impervious surface proposed as was previously planned.

Mr. Loreti asked whether Symmes Neighborhood Advisory Committee members present had questions. Beth Ann Friedman asked what assurance there was that the Medical Office Building site would not be developed. Mr. Loreti replied that the Board intended to offer no assurance that the Medical Office Building site would not be developed, since it was originally planned as a development site, and that has not changed. Ms. Friedman commented that the number of units exceed the settlement agreement because of the 90 assisted living units planned in the Upton proposal. Mr. Upton replied that the size of the townhouse units and the size of the assisted living footprint was similar, but the units in the assisted living facility would be much smaller, 300 square feet, and that the impact on traffic, school system and bedroom size all are expected to be less with assisted living than with townhouses.

Mr. Loreti asked the Board whether members saw any significant obstacles to permitting the concept Mr. Upton had presented. Mr. West said absolutely not. Other Board members agreed, indicating interest in seeing more detail soon.

Michele Barry of the Symmes Neighborhood Advisory Committee commented that because the Town is responsible for the Medical Office Building site, not the developer, "for the plan to work the Town would have to agree not to build". Mr. Loreti responded that he did not agree with the premise that developing the Medical Office Building site decreased the open space since it was always proposed for development, and was not included in the proposed protected open space. After further discussion, Mr. Loreti clarified that the settlement agreement did not apply to the Medical Office Building site. Mr. Loreti asked about Ms. Barry's focus on the number of units. Ms. Barry replied that this is the only leverage for the neighbors. Mr. Cayer asked to confirm whether density or leverage was important to the SNAC.

The Board asked Mr. Upton to document trips per day on the assisted living proposal.

Mr. Loreti commented that he could not foresee the Board compromising the views from the vista park. Mr. Budge Upton commented that it was in their interest also to protect those views.

The Board concluded the Symmes discussion and then turned to the Planning & Zoning Workshop. The objective was to determine the scope of planning and zoning issues that the Board would address more fully throughout the year at future Planning & Zoning Workshops. On community surveying and outreach for master planning, Ms. Kowalski would forward information or internet links to the Board for methods other communities have used successfully.

Mr. West then gave an overview of the Mill District concept developed as an ancillary effort to the Open Space plan.

Mr. Cayer and the Board then discussed the role and perception of the Board in the community, with an emphasis on conveying to the community that the Board is listening. This relates to the importance of the community surveying and input phase of the master plan, Ms. Kowalski observed. Mr. Fitzsimmons commented on both the need to hear from the community and to show some leadership, as well. Mr. Fields stated the importance for the Board in getting ahead and shaping the Town's fate with community input, rather than being in a reactionary position, catching up to events. Mr. Fields observed that people in Arlington don't realize at all that the ARB's responsibility is also to plan.

Mr. Loreti asked Ms. Kowalski to check on which committees former ARB members Ed Tsoi and Roland Chaput had served as ARB liaisons so these may be re-assigned to ARB members.

On the Bio-Ready designation, Mr. Loreti observed that it was a simple application, and that regulations or review procedures were not required.

Regarding Arlington Center, Mr. West commented on the need for a designated person to shepherd Arlington Center's revitalization, as per the commercial development study produced by Larry Koff & Associates for the Town. He added that the Board should look at short-term opportunities without a dedicated staff person. Ms. Kowalski would provide the Board with hard copies of the Arlington Center slides. The Board discussed seeking Community Development Block Grant funds for facilities. Ms. Kowalski was asked to identify the short-term opportunities for the Board to make improvements to Arlington Center.

Ms. Wiener mentioned the Clean Air and Mobility Program (C.L.A.M.P.) grant for designing improved connections across Arlington Center for the bikepath.

Mr. Fitzsimmons led the discussion to determine the scope of the zoning districts workshop item, noting that it was not the large number of districts that was a concern, but the "checkerboarding" of small amounts of land in the districts.

Regarding the signage item in the workshop, Mr. Loreti identified three aspects to the issue: how to get good signage, how to keep good signage, and enforcement when signs go up that aren't good, or aren't allowed. In the 1970s, there was more money in the community for signage. The Town's "Sign Sense" brochure needs to be updated. Ms. Kowalski urged that the update be placed on the website, allowing the limited resources to be spent on updating the text and graphics and layout, rather than on producing hard copies. Ms. Kowalski would compile for the Board any methods used in Massachusetts for applying for a sign other than through a building permit.

Mr. Cayer then moved to adjourn, and Mr. Fields seconded. All voted in favor and the meeting adjourned at 9:55 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Carol Kowalski
Secretary ex Officio